



WCPCG-2011

Relation among quality of attachment, hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in college students

Bagher Ghobari Bonab^a*, Ali Akbar Haddadi Koohsar

^aUniversity of Tehran, Faculty of Psychology&Education, Ale Ahmad Ave, Tehran, P.O.Box.14155-6456, Iran

^bUniversity of Tehran, Faculty of Psychology&Education, Ale Ahmad Ave, Tehran, P.O.Box.14155-6456, Iran

Abstract

The aim of the current research was to investigate the relationship between quality of attachment with hostility and interpersonal Sensitivity in Tehran and Iran Medical Sciences Universities. To accomplish the stated goal 467 students from Tehran and Iran Medical Sciences Universities were selected by means of proportional sampling procedure. The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (Collins, 1996) and Scales of Hostility and Interpersonal Sensitivity in Symptom Checklist90-Revised (Derogatis et al., 1973) were administered on them. Analysis of data using a multiple regression analysis revealed that the magnitude of hostility and interpersonal sensitivity can be predicted from the quality of student's attachment. Moreover, data revealed that students who had an anxious attachment were higher in hostility and interpersonal sensitivity than students who had a close attachment (being comfortable with intimacy) and depend attachment (dependability of others). Authors concluded that close and depend attachment were associated with lower hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in college students who were studying in Medical Sciences Universities.

© 2011 Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of the 2nd World Conference on Psychology, Counselling and Guidance.

Keywords: Quality of Attachment; Hostility; Interpersonal Sensitivity; Medical Sciences Universities Students; Iran

1. Introduction

Interpersonal problems are one of the high incidence problems that reported with client who are in psychiatric clinics (Horowitz, 1982) Individuals with anxious, and avoidant attachment have problem in regulating their emotions, and they show more hostile behaviors toward others (Shaver et al., 1987).

Individuals with a secure attachment during their encounter with disappointing situations hold their optimistic views and they know that adversities are under control; there fore they don't exhibit anger or hostility (Mikulincer, 1998., Cassidy, 1994).

Meesters and Muris (2002), found an inverse correlation between secure attachment with anger, and hostility in personal relations. Zimmermann and associates (2001) found that in stressful situations anger and hostile behaviors are more prevalent in insecure adolescents. However, these conducts were much less in adolescents with a secure attachment. There are more data accumulation that show anger and hostility are more prevalent in individual with

* Bagher Ghobari Bonab. Tel.: +98-912-102-0324; fax: +98-21-882-54734

E-mail address: bghobari@ut.ac.ir

avoidant attachment (Calamari & Pini, 2003; Magai et al., 2000). In addition friends and family member of individuals with avoidant attachment have reported more hostile behaviors on them (Keren & Stevens, 1996).

Critchfield and associates (2008) concluded that insecure attachment is associated with irritability, anger, and hostility. Moreover, relationship between anxious attachment with anger, and hostility in relationship have been confirmed (Bung, 1997; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Simpson and colleagues (1996) showed that individual with anxious attachment were not competent in conflict resolution. They were more hostile toward their partner in compare to individuals with a secure attachment.

Diamond and Hicks (2005) showed that individuals with an insecure attachment are irritable, have a low frustration capacity, and they became agitated in stressful situations. Researchers reported associations between self-reports of attachment style and creative problem solving, Intergroup hostility, reactions to others needs, accessibility of mental representations of attachment figure, rejection sensitivity, and appraisal of interpersonal competencies and reported that these variables all were significant after controlling for positive mood, self esteem or trait anxiety (e.g., Mikulincer, Gillath & Shaver, 2002; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001).

Attachment anxiety is associated with fears of rejection, and high level of negative affect. While, attachment avoidant is associated with negative image of others, defensive minimisation of affect, interpersonal hostility, and social withdrawal (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer, Shaver & Pereg, 2003).

Although research findings show that quality of attachment is related to individuals personal characteristics and their mental health status, most of these investigations have been conducted in the United States and European countries. Since people in Iran are different from Americans and European countries in terms of their cultural and religious backgrounds, investigating the relation of these constructs in individuals who live in Iran is necessary. This study fills the existing gap in the area.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Population in the current study was consisted of college students in Tehran and Iran Medical Sciences Universities. A proportional sampling procedure was utilized in this study and 467 college students between 18-25 years were selected as a sample. In this study 53% of the participants were female, and 47% of them were male, 89% were single, 64% were Shia Muslim, 56% were residing in Tehran (the capital city), and 26% were from other major cities. After preparation of assessment devices, questionnaires were administered on college student by a trained research assistant. Permission of instructors was sought to distribute questionnaires at the end of their classes. All instructors that we contacted had a good cooperation. In general 467 individuals completed the questionnaires.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Hostility and Interpersonal Sensitivity Scales of Symptom Checklist90-R (SCL90-R, Derogotis et al., 1973).

This symptom checklist is consisted of 90 items in which each item requires responding in degree of symptom intensity (from 1-5) in which he/ she have experienced during the past week. This checklist -consisted of nine scales (dimensions) including somatization, obsessive-compulsive disorders, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, and psychoticism. In order to calculate the internal consistency of the scale cronbach alpha coefficient has been used, and the results indicated that internal consistency for all scales were at a satisfactory level. The maximum alpha coefficient was 0.90 for depression, and the minimum value was for psychoticism ($\alpha = 0.77$). Stability coefficient that was computed for test-retest reliability in the interval of one week was between 0.87 and 0.90. In the current investigation alpha coefficient for the hostility and interpersonal sensitivity scales was 0.81 and 0.81 respectively.

2.2.2. Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS; Collins, 1996).

We used the Farsi version of the RAAS (Haddadi Koohsar, 2010). This scale is consisted of 18 items and three subscales 1) *discomfort with dependency* higher scores reflect greater discomfort depending on others. 2) *the discomfort with closeness scale*, higher scores reflect greater discomfort with closeness and intimacy, and, 3) *the anxious score*, higher scores reflect stronger fear of being rejected or unloved. Internal consistency for all subscales has been calculated in a high level: alpha coefficients for discomfort with closeness was 0.82, for discomfort with dependency was estimated 0.80, and for the anxious subscale was 0.83 (Collins, 1996). In the current investigation alpha coefficient for the close, depend, and anxious subscales was 0.48, 0.55, and 0.79 respectively.

3. Results

The results have been presented in the following tables:

Table 1. Matrix of correlation between attachment styles with hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in college students

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.SCL90-R-Hostility	3.80	4.04	-				
2.SCL90-R-Interpersonal Sensitivity	8.34	6.32	0.64**	-			
3.RAAS-Close Attachment	13.94	3.34	-0.06	0.25**	-		
4.RAAS-Depend Attachment	16.76	4.16	-0.28**	-0.34**	0.29**	-	
5.RAAS-Anxious Attachment	15.47	5.73	0.32**	0.43**	-0.17**	-0.17**	-

** P < 0.01 * P < 0.05

Table 1 shows that attachment styles was associated with hostility and interpersonal sensitivity. Individuals, who show a close and depend attachment, were lower in hostility and interpersonal sensitivity.

Table 2. Multiple regression analysis method to predict hostility and interpersonal sensitivity from student's attachment styles

Variables		R	R ²	F	P	B	SEB	β
Dependent	Predictor							
SCL90-R	Stepwise Regression	0.36	0.13	28.59	0.001			
Hostility	Anxious Attachment					0.19**	0.04	0.26
	Depend Attachment					-0.18**	0.05	-0.18
SCL90-R	Stepwise Regression	0.49	0.24	39.91	0.001			
Interpersonal	Anxious Attachment					0.38**	0.05	0.33
Sensitivity	Depend Attachment					-0.27**	0.07	-0.17
	Close Attachment					-0.30**	0.09	-0.15

**P < 0/01 * P < 0/05

As indicated in table 2 only depend (dependability of others), and anxious attachment were significant predictors of hostility (R²=13%) and interpersonal sensitivity (R²=24%). In other words hostility and interpersonal sensitivity of students with anxious attachment were higher than other students. Moreover, hostility and interpersonal sensitivity of students with depend attachment were lower than other students. Inspecting Beta analysis shows that anxious attachment can positively predicts magnitude of hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in students, while depend attachment were negatively associated with hostility and interpersonal sensitivity.

4. Discussion

In the current study relation between attachment styles and hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in college students has been investigated. Results of multiple regression analysis indicated that hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in college students can be predicted by their attachment styles. Individuals, who hold a secure attachment style, are lower in hostility and interpersonal sensitivity in compare to others, and individuals who had a insecure attachment style, were higher in hostility and interpersonal sensitivity. The results of the current study

are consistent with some other investigation (e.g., Critchfield et al., 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver., 2008; Mikulincer, Gillath & Shaver., 2002; Shaver & Pereg, 2003).

Critchfield and associates (2008) concluded that insecure attachment is associated with irritability, anger, and hostility. Moreover, relationship between anxious attachment with anger, and hostility in relationship have been confirmed (Bung, 1997; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Simpson and colleagues (1996) showed that individual with anxious attachment were not competent in conflict resolution. They were more hostile toward their partner in compare to individuals with a secure attachment.

Researchers reported associations between self-reports of attachment style and creative problem solving, Intergroup hostility, reactions to others needs, accessibility of mental representations of attachment figure, rejection sensivity, and appraisal of interpersonal competencies and reported that these variables all were significant after controlling for positive mood, self esteem or trait anxiety (e.g., Mikulincer, Gillath & Shaver, 2002; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001).

Attachment avoidance is associated with negative image of others, defensive minimisation of affect, interpersonal hostility, and social withdrawal (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003). There are more data accumulation that show anger and hostility are more prevalent in individual with avoidance attachment (Calamari & Pini, 2003; Magai et al., 2000). In addition friends and family member of individuals with avoidance attachment have reported more hostile behaviors on them (Keren, Stevens, 1996). Critchfield and associates (2008) concluded that insecure attachment is associated with irritability anger, and hostility. These findings are consistent with result of the current study. Since the current study was an Expost Facto research developing a causal relation between attachment styles and psychological distress was not possible. Investigators in the future can design an experimental design in which environmental prompting instigate the attachment styles in individuals, and study their consequence in development or escalation of psychological distress. Current study has implications for prevention, and interventions of psychological problems in individuals. Improvement of individuals' attachment style yields to enhancement in their health status.

References

- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults. A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 226–244.
- Buunk, B. P. (1997). Personality birth order and attachment styles as related to various types of jealousy. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 23, 997–1006.
- Calamari, E., & Pini, M. (2003). Dissociative experiences and anger proneness in late adolescent females with different attachment styles. *Adolescence*, 38, 287–303.
- Cassidy, J. (1994). Emotion regulation: Influences of attachment relationships. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 59, 228–283.
- Collins, N. L. (1996). Working models of attachment: Implications for explanation, emotion, and behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 810–832.
- Critchfield, K.L., Levy, K.N., Clarkin, J.F, Kernberg, O.F(2008). The relational context of aggression in borderline personality disorder: using adult attachment style to predict forms of hostility. *J Clin Psychol*. 64(1):67-82.
- Derogastis, L.R., Lipman, R.S., & Covi, C. (1973). SCL- 90: An out patient psychiatric rating scale-preliminary report. *Psychopharmacology Bulletin*, 9, 13-27.
- Diamond, L. M., & Hicks, A. M. (2005). Attachment style, current relationship security, and negative emotions: The mediating role of physiological regulation. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22, 499– 518.
- Haddadi Koohsar, A.A. (2010). Relation between emotional intelligence and quality of attachment in high school administrators, *presented in the 1st national congress on social factors effective in college student's health* oct 13-14; Tehran, Iran.
- Horowitz, M. J. (1982). Psychological processes induced by illness, injury, and loss. In T. Millon, C. Green, & R. Meagher (Eds.), *Handbook of clinical health psychology* (pp. 53–68). New York: Plenum Press.
- Kerns, K. A., & Stevens, A. C. (1996). Parent–child attachment in late adolescence: Links to social relations and personality. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 25, 323–342.

- Magai, C., Hunziker, J., Mesias, W., & Culver, L. (2000). Adult attachment styles and emotional biases. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 24, 301–309.
- Meesters, C., & Muris, P. (2002). Attachment style and self-reported aggression. *Psychological Reports*, 90, 231–235.
- Mikulincer, M. (1998b). Adult attachment style and individual differences in functional versus dysfunctional experiences of anger. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 513–524.
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2001). Attachment theory and intergroup bias: Evidence that priming the secure base schema attenuates negative reactions to out-groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81, 97–115.
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Mikulincer, M., Gillath, O., & Shaver, P. R. (2002). Activation of the attachment system in adulthood: Threat-related primes increase the accessibility of mental representations of attachment figures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83, 881–895.
- Mikulincer, M., Shaver, P. R., & Pereg, D. (2003). Attachment theory and affect regulation: the dynamics, development, and cognitive consequences of attachment-related strategies. *Motivation and Emotion*, 27, 77–102.
- Shaver, P. R., Schwartz, J., Kirson, D., & O'Connor, C. (1987). Emotion knowledge: Further exploration of a prototype approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 1061–1086.
- Simpson, J. A., Rholes, W. S., & Phillips, D. (1996). Conflict in close relationships: An attachment perspective. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 899–914.
- Zimmermann, P., Maier, M. A., Winter, M., & Grossmann, K. E. (2001). Attachment and adolescents' emotion regulation during a joint problemsolving task with a friend. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 25, 331–343.